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AUTHOR Murphy, Ann G.; Haugerud, Al
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ABSTRACT

Thirty-six schools were involved in a three-year-long investigation of the utility of the Right to Read model for assessing and planning needed improvements in school reading programs. Among the findings were the following: (1) The Right to Read model was not useful for addressing all of the improvement-related problems faced by the schools. In particular, it seemed too cumbersome for the straightforward program changes some schools needed to make and too limited for addressing complex problems with political and fiscal sources. (2) The model had to be altered or adapted in order to use it in several schools. The most frequent adaptations included tailoring the model for use in secondary schools, supplementing it with the use of additional tools and strategies for diagnosing problem areas, and incorporating activities to help school staffs clarify their values and assumptions about program improvements. (3) The model was helpful in aiding schools in considering questions about where they were, where they wanted to be, and how they should get there. (Appendixes contain checkpoints for the evaluation project and a chart comparing the model's implicit assumptions about program change with the "real world" constraints that the project encountered.) (Author/FL)

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THE USE OF THE RIGHT TO READ MODEL

FOR

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

A Synthesis of Learnings from Project Papers
and Symposia

Ann G. Murphy
Al Haugerud

The Northwest Reading Consortium
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Dr. Frank B. Brouillet
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Dr. Jack Frisk
Deputy Superintendent

Dr. Monica Schmidt
Assistant Superintendent
Division of Instructional and Professional Services

Dr. Alfred Rasp, Jr.
Director
Testing and Evaluation

Dr. Albert R. Haugerud
Director
Northwest Reading Consortium

Dr. Harry W. Johnson II
Evaluator
Northwest Reading Consortium

The Northwest Reading Consortium has been a three year school improvement project funded under the Research and Development Program, National Institute of Education.

Four linkers, one each in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington, worked with 7 - 10 local schools per state in improvement of reading instruction. The linkers were housed in an intermediate agency in the state; the major contractor for the NRC was the Washington State Department, Superintendent of Public Instruction. A subcontract for development of a knowledge base and technical assistance was held by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Portland,Oregon).

The NRC was originally formed by the Right to Read Directors of the four states. The design of the project provided for interface with each state's Right to Read program and the state R2R Planning and Assessment Handbook provided the basic model of problem-solving used with local schools. One goal of the R2R Directors was the further elucidation of the R2R model. This paper discusses some of the learnings generated through NRC experiences in the use of this model in instructional improvement efforts.

THE USE OF THE RIGHT TO READ MODEL FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

The primary goal of the Northwest Reading Consortium has been to aid instructional improvement efforts in reading at local schools via linkage with research and development outcomes. The project, originally formed by the state Right to Read directors from Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington, used the Right to Read Planning and Assessment Handbook as the vehicle for working with local schools seeking to improve reading instruction.

The group problem-solving approach delineated by the Right to Read manual influenced the philosophical orientation of the NRC. Districts selected to participate in the project had previously been involved in the Right to Read effort and therefore project schools were at least somewhat familiar with, and supportive of, the model.

A study of adoptions by NRC sites, correlated with analysis of the decision-making process used by each site, showed that sites which adhered to a problem-solving model were more likely to adopt R&D outcomes as solutions for the problems. For other sites, however, the R2R model was not used consistently; in many cases because the R2R handbook was apparently inappropriate for their needs. At a few sites, data from NRC checkpoints showed little use of any formal problem-solving model.

To expect any model for decision-making to meet the needs of all schools is unrealistic. As Moore and Arends point out in the Belmont Conference Reports (NIE, November, 1977), no change strategy or problem-solving process has been proven by research to lead to consistent benefits. The R2R handbook is directed toward particular types of program change. School problems which are of great magnitude, severity and political impact are beyond the scope of the R2R model; relatively minor instructional improvement efforts may be impeded by the steps in the R2R process.

The learnings generated by these variations in use of the R2R model fulfilled a second goal of the NRC: The further elucidation of the model. The project design supported a developmental orientation which led, over a three-year period, to modification and refinement of the R2R problem-solving process. Expectations around utilization of research and development outcomes, the length of time linkers were involved with sites and formal linker training influenced the developmental nature of the project.

As a result of project experiences, R2R procedures were expanded to meet monitoring needs of the project, adapted to individual needs of local sites and modified to meet needs of secondary schools. The use of diagnostic tools, the incorporation of organizational development strategies, the identification of the importance of clarifying educational values and role perceptions represent areas in which the R2R model was supplemented.

The concentrated use of the R2R Planning and Assessment Handbook as the model for group problem-solving activities related to improvement of reading instruction suggested directions for the development of a more flexible set of guidelines maintaining the structure and philosophy of the Right to Read manual. Such guidelines would also be applicable to improvement efforts in other basic skill areas.

The R2R model is essentially an application of a Planning, Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS); it is designed to facilitate use of the knowledge (data) and processes necessary for what Corrigan calls "predictable education management" (A System Approach for Education, 1969). According to Corrigan, the goal of such a system approach to education is the assurance of:

a. Total objectivity in decision-making
b. Total internal-consistency between successive action commitments
c. Total control for sensing, evaluating and correcting system operations (p.19)

Extensive use of the R2R model by the NRC generated evidence that it did not

address budget issues as thoroughly as might be expected, nor was it totally possible to maintain a systems approach emphasis on objectivity and control.

The Right to Read manual, categorized as a problem-solving model, does address three essential questions which Schmuck, et. al. suggest must be answered for effective problem-solving:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. How can we get there?

(Schmuck, Runkel, Arends and Arends. Second Handbook of Organizational Development in Schools. 1977)

Certainly the R2R Planning and Assessment Handbook provides the tools for answering these key questions with the clarity and objectivity espoused by a PPBS system; the model is highly systematic and rational. When solutions to a school problem can be identified primarily through the collection and analysis of data, the R2R model is effective. Many school problems are, however, more complex and multi-faceted than suggested by system approaches; certainly the human aspect is more complex.

> "A key issue is the degree to which the rational problem-solving paradigm...is pertinent to school improvement. In light of the gap between tenets of the rational paradigm and the behavior of people in schools as they define and deal with their day-to-day reality, it seems critical that (linking approaches) be investigated that build more closely on the way effective school-based people actually do solve educational problems, rather than on normative ideas about how problems should be solved." (Moore, Belmont Conference Report, 1977. p.17)

An early attempt by NRC personnel to summarize learnings about the use of the R2R process resulted in the identification of several basic discrepancies between assumptions made by the R2R model and the behavior of people in schools. The general conclusion drawn at that time (July, 1977) was that the reasons envisioned by R2R for participation are frequently not those held by the school. School-based reasons seemed to be more related to socio/political (or economic) factors than to commitment to instructional

improvement. Further analysis of experiences with schools over the duration of the project indicated that the issues were far more complex than had been identified initially. Factors such as awareness, readiness and the match between school needs and the assistance being provided all impact on school improvement efforts.

Although the work done at that early meeting was somewhat unfocused, it provided a starting point for the emergence of one of the major learnings of the NRC -- the importance of the role of philosophies and values in instructional improvement efforts.

> "Decision-making of any kind...is difficult when those involved hold different values about the purposes of education and the ways of schooling. It is all the more difficult when organization members are unaware of these differences and their influence on the way in which collaborative work is carried out." (Schmuck, Runkel, Arends and Arends, 1977, p.352)

The necessity for including processes that permit exploration of the varying educational values that may surround the problem-solving process is a recommendation that comes out clearly in NRC summaries of learnings. These learnings suggest that philosophical variations may occur within at least three areas in instructional improvement efforts:

- Procedures for improving instructional programs
- Characteristics of an optimum instructional program
- Usefulness of research and development outcomes and accessibility of such information

Moore (Belmont Conference Report, November, 1977) supports the finding that so-called rational designs for problem-solving cannot be considered "value-neutral." He points out that those who advocate that schools get involved in rational problem-solving processes "are advocating a specific change in the way a school, school community or school district makes decisions (and that) that may or may not have beneficial effects for these client system." A particular problem-solving model may in itself be an innovation for a school -- a "solution" to a "problem" at least to those

who philosophically support that type of approach. The implications of introducing a type of decision-making that may, at least initially, impede the instructional improvement efforts of a particular school that has previously made effective changes via some other approach need to be carefully considered.

NRC experiences with schools involved in instructional improvement efforts have led to the generalization that group problem-solving is a complex process which must be used flexibly and adaptively. School problems and, therefore, improvement efforts are multi-dimensional in nature. There is a need for processes that permit:

- Analysis of both cognitive and affective aspects of the problem,
- Consideration of the several social-psychological levels at which the problem exists, and
- Recognition that a multi-determined problem may require multiple solutions

(Schmuck, et. al., 1977)

If the Right to Read model is supplemented with such processes, then findings of the NRC suggest that it can be an effective mechanism for exploring research and development outcomes as a basis for instructional improvement.

APPENDIX A

Checkpoints for Northwest Reading Consortium
(Documentation points - <u>each site</u>)

Checkpoint 1: Selection and commitment of site

Checkpoint 2: Organization of building task force

Checkpoint 3: Initiation of task force meetings and determination of target group

Checkpoint 4: Completion of assessment procedure

Checkpoint 5: Problem identification completed; statement of critical priorities

Checkpoint 6: Development of site-specific problem statement and establishing of goals and objectives

Checkpoint 7: Research and Development Outcomes reviewed; statement of unresolved needs.

Checkpoint 8: Completion of implementation planning

Checkpoint 9: Installation of R & D outcomes

Checkpoint 10: Management activities (monitoring installation)

Checkpoint 11: Monitoring implementation progress

Checkpoint 12: Evaluating program improvements

All checkpoints include related R_2R charts and a "Climate for Instructional Improvement" survey.

APPENDIX B

An early attempt by NRC personnel to summarize learnings about the use of the R2R process generated the following list of discrepancies between assumptions initially held about the use of this process and alternative observations of behaviors of people in some schools.

R2R	"Real World"
a. The school/district has a real need and commitment to strengthen the reading program.	1. Statistical evidence of academic deficiency is needed to demonstrate to funding agencies that there is a reason for receiving MONEY.
b. All school personnel have the desire and motivation to improve the reading program.	2. Becoming a "R2R District" is a way to keep up with other districts.
c. There is sufficient payoff for teachers that they want to be involved.	3. The community is putting pressure on the district; this is a way to show responsiveness.
d. All personnel support this (R2R) process for making changes.	4. The R2R movement is just like "all the other federal programs;" it is a waste of time because it won't make any difference.
e. Teachers view themselves as developers of curriculum.	5. Curriculum development is the responsibility of administrators.
f. The Task Force has access to all necessary information and has the knowledge and skills needed for implementing change. g. The Task Force has both decision making skill and decision making power.	6. Commitment to reading and instructional improvement is real, but the process used to reach goals does does not resemble the R2R model.
h. The R2R director for the district has time, power and support to "carry the ball."	7. The R2R director for the district is frequently "powerless."

(NRC Staff meeting, Issaquah, July 1977)